



State of Connecticut
Latino and Puerto Rican
Affairs Commission

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Testimony Supporting Bills

SB-856 and HB-5894

Orlando J. Rodriguez

Associate Legislative Analyst, Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission

Public Health Committee, February 20th, 2015

Hartford, CT

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee; my name is Orlando Rodriguez and I am an Associate Legislative Analyst with the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC). With direction from its board, LPRAC supports SB-856 An Act Concerning Language Interpreters in Hospitals and HB-5894 An Act Increasing the Availability of Licensed Medical Interpreters for Limited English Proficiency Patients.

Connecticut state law encourages acute care hospitals to use medical interpreters "to the extent possible", but does not require it.¹ We believe medical interpreters must be "required" when there is a sizable **patient** population that does not speak English.

Making an accurate medical diagnosis is complicated and nothing is more crucial than accurate communication between doctor and patient. Surprisingly, misdiagnoses may occur as often as 1-in-5 cases and have, "potential for 'considerable to severe harm' including 'inevitable death.'"² In Connecticut, the number of patients who died or suffered a serious injury from a medication error **doubled** between 2012 and 2013.³

In 2013, more than 136,000 state residents did not speak English well or did not speak English at all, which is a 30 percent increase from 2000.⁴ The largest growth was among residents age 65 and over, which grew by **54 percent**. Furthermore, the 65 and over age group is the largest consumer of healthcare services.⁵

In rural areas of our state, non-English speaking residents may comprise less than 5 percent of the resident population, but more than 5 percent of hospital patients. As proposed, this legislation would not apply in such cases. Consequently, we recommend that the threshold be changed from 5 percent of local **residents** to 5 percent of hospital **patients**. Ultimately, we want to provide interpreters for patients, not residents who may or may not use the local hospital.

This issue is of the utmost importance to Latino communities in Connecticut and we thank you for interest.

¹ Connecticut General Statute § 19a-490i(2)

² Doctors' Diagnostic Errors Are Often Not Mentioned But Can Take A Serious Toll

³ October 2014, Adverse Event Reporting, Appendix B, NQF 4A

⁴ Census 2000 SF3 table P019 and ACS 2009-2013 5-yr table B16004

⁵ CDC U.S. Personal Health Care Spending by Age and Gender 2010 Highlights